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UNCLAS ABUJA 001325

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: KIDNAPPING OF NIGERIAN CHEVRON WORKER

REF: LAGOS 1535

1.(SBU) Embassy's Corporate Responsibility Officer (CRO) spoke July 31 with Ijaw national leader Chief Edwin K. Clark, who confirmed press reports that two Ijaw men (Egbema clan) involved in the kidnapping of the Nigerian Chevron employee (reported reftel), who we understand was released on the morning of August 1, have been arrested in Warri. According to Clark, the two Egbema youth appeared at a July 30 meeting of the Delta State Security Council held by Delta State Government James Ibori in Warri. (Note: This forum is normally restricted to government officials but the Governor has included ethnic leaders since the outbreak of inter-ethnic violence in Warri in March 2003. end note)

2.(SBU) When Clark recognized the two as leaders of the group claiming responsibility for the kidnapping, he identified them to Ibori. Ibori promptly ordered their arrest, claims Clark. Ibori also reportedly issued an ultimatum to the other kidnappers: release the Chevron officials within 48 hours or risk police action. Clark stressed the Egbema youth involved in this extortion had neither his support nor that of Egbema elders. "They're just criminals," he said.

3.(SBU) CRO also spoke July 31 with Chevron's Abuja-based General Manager for Governmental and Public Affairs, Sola Omole, who explained that PENGASSAN, the union of white-collar Nigerian oil workers, had written to Chevron urging the company to produce the release of its kidnapped member within 72 hours. He said the PENGASSAN letter cited concerns for the employee's well-being, but the union never threatened to strike over this matter. In Omole's words: "if they've threatened to strike, we don't know about it."

4.(SBU) Comment: This was a criminal act, carried out by youth acting outside the guidance of recognized Ijaw leaders, even outside the Ijaw militant group "FNDIC." This is not an outgrowth of the ongoing Warri crisis, which centers on fighting between the Itsekiri and the Ijaw Gbaramatu clan over political representation and control of the oil-rich Warri region. Apparently, this also was not a case of the union flexing its muscle to demand that Chevron win the release of its member. The story of a PENGASSAN threat was likely the brainchild of an irresponsible journalist. Given PENGASSAN's lack of eagerness to join the recent national labor strike against the fuel increase, it never seemed likely that PENGASSAN would halt oil production now. Oil production was never threatened by this kidnapping.

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